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# Teachers' perceptions of the value of outdoor learning in a period of curriculum and governance reform

Professor Heather Prince  
University of Cumbria



# Rationale for research

- Gap in knowledge about how teachers see the outdoor classroom; how and why they are using it (Rickinson et al, 2004; Hawxwell et al, 2019)
- Better understanding needed of breadth and depth of outdoor learning practice to encourage the development and use of good practice and raise the value placed on outdoor learning (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2018)
- Opportunity to explore change over time (22 years) with different curricula & governance
- Situate outdoor learning research in a wider theoretical framework



# Method

Replicate surveys of state primary schools in England  
1995 (n=61) and 2017 (n=40)

Postal questionnaires completed by teachers about outdoor  
education/outdoor learning provision in their schools

Response rate overall of 40% ( 60%, 1995; 20% 2017);  
Replicate response rate: 11%

## Differentiation of phases

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (0-5 yrs)
- Key Stage 1 (KS1) (5-7 yrs)
- Key Stage 2 (KS2) (7-11 yrs)

## & locations

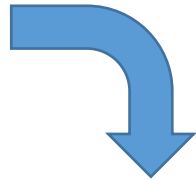
- urban
- suburban
- rural



# Analysis

Descriptive analysis of quantitative data for order and variation  
(ranking questions, closed questions)

Thematic analysis of qualitative data, codes and themes (open  
responses)



Teachers' aspirations, expertise and values





# Outdoors as the optimum learning environment



Rank	1995 (n=45)	2017 (n=34)
1	Environmental Education/Nature	Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)
2	Personal and Social Education (PSE)	Nature
3	Fieldwork	Forest School





# Stated teacher expertise



	1995	2017	% change
Yes	53% [n=32]	41% [n=16]	-12%
No	47% [n=29]	59% [n=24]	+12%



# Continuing Professional Development (CPD) interests

	1995 (n=61)	2017 (n=40)	% change
Scientific investigation outdoors	21%	26%	+5%
Cross-curricular use of school grounds	20%	25%	+5%
Outdoor and adventurous activities (school grounds)	20%	26%	+6%
Teaching map work skills	13%	12%	-1%
Management and safety of groups outdoors	9%	3%	-6%
Outdoor and adventurous activities (centre based)	4%	3%	-1%
Reviewing	1%	0%	-1%





# Ranking of teachers' CPD interests (2017)

Rank	CPD
1	Creativity in the outdoors
2	Scientific investigation outdoors
3	Outdoor and adventurous activities (school grounds)
4	Cross-curricular use of school grounds
5	Forest School
6	Literacy and numeracy outdoors



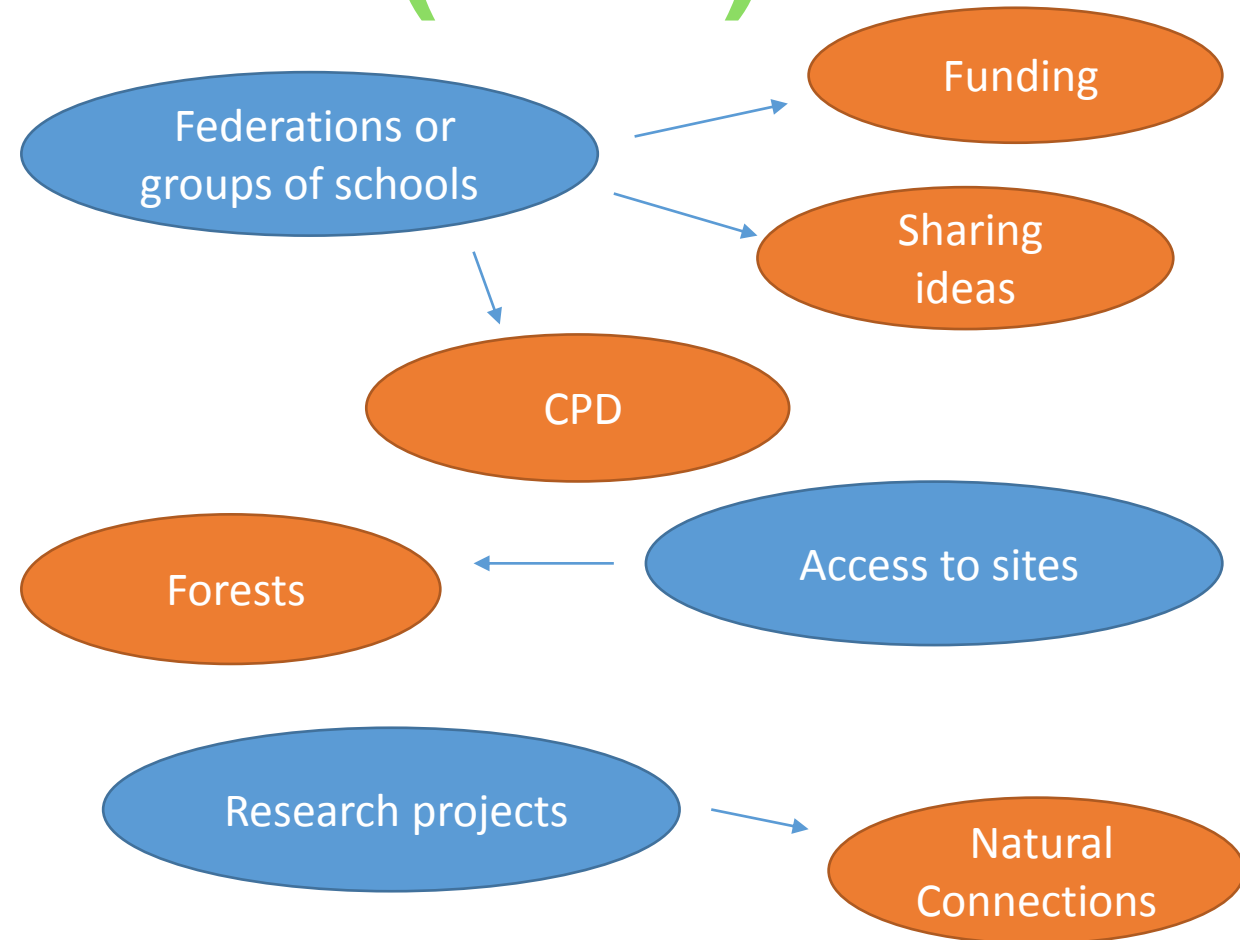
# Effect of curricular reform on outdoor learning provision

Responses	1995 (n=57)	2017 (n=34)	% change
Yes (increased)	25%	44%	+19%
No	58%	50%	-8%
Yes (decreased)	16%	6%	-10%
Yes (no tendency)	1%	-	-1%



# Effect of other government policies, frameworks or local outdoor provision on practice (2017)

Responses	2017 (n=29)
Yes (helped)	46%
Yes (hindered)	25%
No	29%





# The strength of teachers' values

“Outdoor Learning is something we must do.”

“We take the learning outdoors at every opportunity.” (no expertise declared in this school)

“We believe that children often learn better outside the classroom. The factors do not hinder us. We aim to be outside as much as possible.”



“There are no factors that would prevent us from learning outside - we would find somewhere.”

“We run outdoor residentials anyway.”

“(Outdoor Learning) is part of how we teach to provide a rounded education.”





# The sustained value teachers place on Outdoor Learning

Teachers' values transgress curriculum and governance reform

Teachers as '**curriculum makers**' (Lambert & Biddulph, 2015)

Teachers undertake creative boundary work to balance curriculum and pedagogy, mandatory and non-mandatory curriculum content

Teachers use their autonomous space to create a '**personality of change**' (Goodson, 2003) – commitments, beliefs, investments and ownership of their work, the balancing of personal and external forces of change is essential to achieve new practices.

Important for trainee and beginning teachers

Link to professional **identity**? (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009)

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